

# CWD Facts

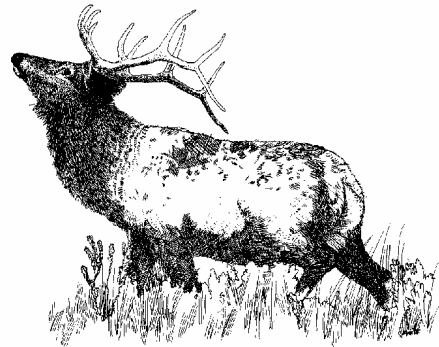
## *(Chronic Wasting Disease)*

### **What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?**

Chronic Wasting Disease is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy related to mad cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) and is fatal. Its origin is unknown but the disease is most similar to sheep scrapie. Based on current information, only elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer are susceptible.

### **How is it transmitted?**

CWD is infectious and contagious but the exact mode of transmission is unknown. Transmission seems to be from animal to animal, or environment to animal, and occurs via feces, saliva, or contact with infected carcasses or the contaminated environment. Effects from environmental contamination can be long lasting. Healthy deer and elk were infected within five years after being placed in Sybille, Wyoming research pens that had been empty of infected animals for 6 months to a year. At a Fort Collins, Colorado research facility, 2 of 12 elk calves became infected and died within 5 years of being placed in sanitized pens, pens that had been plowed, sprayed repeatedly with a strong disinfectant, and left empty for a year before the calf introduction.



### **What percentage of the Jackson elk herd is likely to be infected?**

Based on what is known about infection in free-ranging populations, captive herds, and environmental contamination, experts believe prevalence in the Jackson herd would lie between levels found in free-ranging and confined elk. Because feedground concentrations often exceed concentrations on game farms and elk repeatedly use the same small pieces of habitat, which would likely increase environmental contamination with the CWD agent, US Fish and Wildlife Service and most wildlife health professionals believe the rate of CWD (when it arrives) will be significantly higher than rates found in non-fed elk populations. The disease has not yet been detected on a feedground and no one knows what prevalence will eventually be reached. Even in non-fed elk populations, no population affected by CWD has shown a decrease in prevalence over time and no stable levels have been maintained. Game farm herds have reached rates of 50-90% before they have been depopulated. Data on free-ranging elk have shown a very slow rate of increase in prevalence of the disease; while game farms/research facilities have suggested that fairly rapid spread of infection is possible.

In the draft Bison and Elk Management Plan/EIS, prevalence was described as 2-4% in free-ranging elk to 59-100% in captive elk, respectively). More current data for Wyoming show that CWD in the wild occurs at rates in affected non-fed elk populations from 0.5 to almost 10% and from 0.5 to 30% in deer. This disease is notoriously unevenly distributed in the environment.